

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 /068 W

-----240509 022019 /13

P R 240423Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2770

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 0707

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VN, NZ

SUBJECT: VIETNAM REPORTEDLY WOULD WELCOME AN AMERICAN PRESENCE

SUMMARY: NEW ZEALAND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT JUST RETURNED FROM HANOI QUOTE VIETNAM OFFICIALS AS BEING READY TO WELCOME AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN HANOI. VIETNAM OFFICIALS DESCLAIMED INTENTION OF USING ARMY OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY'S BORDERS. CONTINUED MAINTENANCE OF LARGE MILITARY FORCES WAS FOR LEGITIMATE DEFENSE AND ECONOMIC REBUILDING OF THE COUNTRY. END SUMMARY.

1. ON FEBRUARY 23 I TALKED AT LENGTH TO NATIONAL PARTY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT WILLIAM F. BIRCH WHO WITH FELLOW MP BARRY BRILL HAD RETURNED ON PREVIOUS DAY FROM THREE-WEEK VISIT TO THE FAR EAST, INCLUDING FOUR DAYS IN HANOI. BIRCH SAID HE AND BRILL HAD TRAVELED BY TRAIN FROM HONG KONG VIA CANTON TO HANOI. THEY WERE
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HOUSED IN A FINE OLD FRENCH VILLA RATHER THAN AT THE LARGE TONG LOI HOTEL BUILT BY THE CUBANS. THEIR HOST WAS GIAN HOHN, NORTH VIETNAMESE FOREIGN MINISTER FROM 1946-54 AND MINISTER OF CULTURE FROM 1954-1976. HOHN IS PRESENTLY CHAIRMAN OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF THE VIETNAM PARLIAMENT. OTHER OFFICIALS VISITING PARLIAMENTARIANS SAW WERE THE MINISTER OF

AGRICULTURE AND THE SENIOR VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, CO TACH. BIRCH AND BRILL ALSO TALKED WITH UNICEF OFFICIALS AND RESIDENT DIPLOMATS IN HANOI.

2. MOST NOTEWORTHY OCCURRENCE IN HANOI WAS A STATEMENT TO NEW ZEALANDERS BY CO THACH THAT VIETNAM WOULD WELCOME AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN HANOI "TOMORROW". THIS STATEMENT WAS IN LINE WITH A GENERAL IMPRESSION BIRCH PICKED UP FROM NUMEROUS CONVERSATIONS IN VIETNAM, THAT THE VIETNAM GOVERNMENT IS UNEASY ABOUT HAVING A LOPSIDED COMMUNIST PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRY. THIS IS THE CASE NOW WITH THE SOVIETS BEING VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE, WITH THE CHINESE NEXT. OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRYIES ALSO WERE WELL REPRESENTED, WITH THE CUBANS HELPING OUT IN DAIRYING. SWEDEN HAD THE GREATEST PRESENCE AMONG THE WESTERN COUNTRIES. A COUNTERBALANCING WESTERN PRESENCE, INCLUDING ESPECIALLY THE UNITED STATES, WOULD MAKE THE NORTH VIETNAM GOVERNMENT MORE COMFORTABLE.

3. BIRCH THOUGHT, AS DID OTHERS WITH WHOM HE HAD TALKED IN HANOI, THAT AN OBVIOUS REASON FOR HANOI'S WANTING AN AMERICAN PRESENCE IS THAT VIETNAM IS EMBARKED ON AN AMBITIOUS FIVE-YEAR-PLAN REQUIRING LARGE CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND TECHNOLOGY FROM EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE. HOWEVER, DESIRE FOR FOREIGN AID WAS ONLY PART OF THE PICTURE. BIRCH AND BRILL FOUND AMPLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT WHAT THEY ALREADY HAD HEARD, NAMELY, THAT A STRONG AND WELL-DEFINED VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM EXISTS. CONFIDENTIAL

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WHILE THE GOVERNMENT IS DEDICATED TO THE COMMUNIST SYSTEM, IT DOES NOT INTEND TO LET VIETNAM BECOME A SOVIET OR CHINESE SATELLITE. A LARGE WESTERN PRESENCE COULD HELP ASSURE THAT THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN.

4. ALL VIETNAMESE WITH WHOM BIRCH AND BRILL TALKED DESCLAIMED ANY INTENTION OF USING THE VIETNAM ARMY OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY'S BORDERS. THE RATIONAL FOR MAINTAINING AN ARMY OF UNDIMINISHED SIZE WAS THAT IT IS NECESSARY FOR DEFENSE AND FOR REBUILDING THE COUNTRY. SOLDIERS WERE SEEN ON EVERY HAND BUT NOT MUCH MILITARY EQUIPMENT. SOME BOMB CRATERS WERE SEEN ON THE EDGE OF HANOI, BUT VISIBLE DAMAGE TO THE CITY PROPER WAS MINIMAL. THE VIETNAMESE TOOK THEIR NEW ZEALAND VISITORS TO A HOSPITAL NOW FULLY RESTORED, BUT SUPPOSEDLY HEAVILY DAMAGED BY AMERICAN BOMBS, AND SHOWED THEM PHOTOGRAPHS OF A DESTROYED BUILDING. BUT THE NEW ZEALANDERS COULD NOT BE SURE THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHS THEY LOOKED AT WERE OF THE RESTORED HOSPITAL THEY WERE VIEWING.

5. BIRCH BELIEVES THAT VIETNAM IS TRYING TO USE
PERSUASION RATHER THAN FORCE IN ORGANIZING THE ECONOMY.
THE COMMUNE SYSTEM OF AGRICULTURE OPERATING IN THE
NORTH DID NOT SEEM TO BE WORKIN WELLIN THE SOUTH.
NEVERTHELESS, BIRCH THOUGHT VIETNAM HAD A STRONG
POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, HAVING TIN, COPPER,
IRON AND STEEL, FISHING AND AGRICULTURE. THE VIETNAMESE
PEOPLE, MOVEOVER, STRUCK THE NEW ZEALANDERS AS BEING
ENERGETIC AND VITAL, IN CONTRAST TO THE DOUR AND
UNSMILING CHINESE WHOM THE NEW ZEALANDERS ENCOUNTERED
ON THEIR TRAIN RIDE THROUGH CHINA.

6. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, BIRCH STATED THAT THE
AMERICAN MISSING-IN-ACTION MATTER WAS NOT RAISED
DURING THEIR CONVERSATIONS EITHER BY THEMSELVES OR BY
VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770063-0829
Format: TEL
From: WELLINGTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770211/aaaaajwt.tel
Line Count: 140
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
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Review Content Flags:
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3235520
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: VIETNAM REPORTEDLY WOULD WELCOME AN AMERICAN PRESENCE SUMMARY: NEW ZEALAND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT JUST RETURNED FROM HANOI QUOTE VIETNAM OFFICIALS AS BEING READY
TAGS: PFOR, PDIP, VN, NZ, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4d541fbf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009